

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

HA-05 /064 W

-----023442 180724Z /13

R 170745Z MAR 78

FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2704

C O N F I D E N T I A L ACCRA 2141

EO 11/2: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, PGOV, GH

SUBJ: OPPOSITION POLITICIAN RELEASED, ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER
COMES UNDER FIRE

REFS: (A) ACCRA 1918 (B) ACCRA 1873

1. SUMMARY: GODFREY AMARTEIFIO, A LEADER OF PEOPLE'S
MOVEMENT FOR FREEDOM AND JUSTICE, HAS BEEN RELEASED.
ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER JUSTICE I.K. ABBAN IS BEING
ATTACKED BY PRESS. REGIME MAY HOPE TO REPLACE HIM
IN ORDER TO AVOID A DEFEAT OF UNION GOVERNMENT PROPOSAL
AT MARCH 30 REFERENDUM. END SUMMARY.

2. AMARTEIFIO, PUBLIC RELATIONS DIRECTOR AND FOURTH-
RANKING MAN IN GROUP OPPOSED TO HEAD OF STATE ACHEAMPONG
AND RULING SUPREME MILITARY COUNCIL (SMC), HAS BEEN
RELEASED AFTER BEING DETAINED SINCE MARCH 5 FOR
POSSESSING HANDOUTS URGING CITIZENS TO VOTE "NO" ON
UNION GOVERNMENT IN FORTHCOMING REFERENDUM (REF A).
IT SEEMS LIKELY AMARTEIFIO WAS FREED BECAUSE, AT URGING
OF PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT, ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER ABBAN
TOLD MEDIA THAT HAVING SUCH HANDOUTS IS NOT RPT NOT
AGAINST THE LAW AND BECAUSE GHANA BAR ASSOCIATION
SOUGHT LEGAL REDRESS. FINDING BASIS FOR ARREST THUS
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UNDERCUT, LEFTIST AND PRO-UNION GOVERNMENT PEOPLE'S
EVENING NEWS WAS REDUCED TO EXPLAINING LAMELY IN MARCH 15
EDITORIAL THAT AMARTEIFIO'S ARREST AT SOCCER GAME WAS
DUE NOT TO POSSESSION OF "NO" SYMBOLS BUT "TO AVERT A
POSSIBLE BREACH OF THE PUBLIC PEACE ... (SINCE)...
THERE WAS EVERY POSSIBILITY THAT THOSE IN FAVOR OF
UNION GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE REACTED IN A WAY THAT MIGHT

HAVE LED TO VIOLENCE."

3. IN SAME EDITORIAL, PAPER DEMANDED THAT ABBAN RESIGN IMMEDIATELY BECAUSE ELECTORAL COMMISSION, BY ITS ATTITUDE, IS FAVORING TOO MUCH (THE) OPPONENTS OF UNION GOVERNMENT." PAPER SPECIFICALLY CHARGED THAT ABBAN ALLOWED AMARTEIFIO TO ASK QUESTIONS AT A PRESS CONFERENCE (HELD BEFORE HIS ARREST), EVEN THOUGH HE IS NOT A PRACTICING JOURNALIST. PAPER ALSO ACCUSED ABBAN OF PERMITTING CHANGE IN DESIGN OF "NO" SYMBOL BUT NOT IN THAT OF "YES" SYMBOL FOR REFERENDUM. IT ALSO RAPPED HIM FOR TAKING POLICE TO TASK PUBLICLY FOR ARRESTING PEOPLE WHO WERE CARRYING "NO" SYMBOLS.

4. COMMENT: WITH AMARTEIFIO BACK IN BUSINESS, PACE OF ANTI-UNION GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES OF PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT IS LIKELY TO PICK UP FURTHER. SMC PROBABLY FELT IT HAD TO RELEASE HIM SINCE IT WAS LUDICROUS TO CONTINUE HOLDING HIM ON GROUNDS OF POTENTIALLY DISTURBING THE PEACE TWO WEEKS AGO. ATTACK ON ABBAN IN PEOPLE'S EVENING NEWS FOLLOWS LESS STRIDENT CRITICISMS OF ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER IN MARCH 13 AND 15 EDITORIALS OF GOG-CONTROLLED GHANAIAN TIMES, WHOSE EDITOR, K. GYAWU-KYEM IS A RABID SUPPORTER OF UNION GOVERNMENT. TIMES STOPPED SHORT OF CALLING ON ABBAN TO RESIGN BUT MAY NOW INTENSIFY CRITICISM AFTER PEOPLE'S EVENING NEWS BROADSIDE. ABBAN
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IS THUS COMING UNDER INCREASING FIRE FROM REGIME FOR HIS ADAMANT REFUSAL TO RIG REFERENDUM IN FAVOR OF UNION GOVERNMENT (REF B). ACHEAMPONG PROBABLY HOPES THAT MEDIA ATTACKS WILL ENCOURAGE ABBAN TO LEAVE OFFICE VOLUNTARILY. A MORE DRACONIAN APPROACH -- SACKING HIM AND INSTALLING A MORE PLIANT ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER -- WOULD SUBJECT ACHEAMPONG TO SEVERE PUBLIC CRITICISM, SOMETHING THAT THE HEAD OF STATE DOES NOT NEED ON THE EVEN OF THE REFERENDUM.
SMITH

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NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRISONERS RELEASE, OPPOSITION PARTIES, REFERENDUMS, FORM OF GOVERNMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978ACCRA02141
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780120-0658
Format: TEL
From: ACCRA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780357/aaaabvxd.tel
Line Count: 103
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 92a617c5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 ACCRA 1918, 78 ACCRA 1873
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 03 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3298027
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: OPPOSITION POLITICIAN RELEASED, ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER COMES UNDER FIRE
TAGS: PINT, PINS, PGOV, GH, (AMARTEIFIO, GODFREY), (ABBAN, IK)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/92a617c5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014